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## A TEXTUAL NOTE TO ALEXANDER SCOTT.

IN the first stanza of Alexander Scott's poem 'Ane new yeir gift to the quene Mary,' occurs the expression *oure beill of Albion to beir*. The phrase *beir the beill* has given editors much trouble and it does not seem to me that Mr. Donald in his recent edition of Scott's poems for The Early English Text Society (New Series, Vol. LXXXV), is quite correct in his rendering. Mr. Donald makes no attempt to explain the origin of the expression. The line in question is quoted in Jamieson's *Scottish Dictionary*, but no definition is offered. The meaning there suggested *beill* = 'care, sorrow,' is, of course, impossible in the context. Mr. Donald conjectures 'to be the beill of our Albion,' *i. e.*, to take the lead in Scotland. In the notes he refers to a similar expression in Rolland's *Seven Sages*: *luik than quha beiris the bell*. A reference to Nare's *Glossary of Words, Phrases, Names and Allusions to Customs* (1822) will, I think, give us the real meaning. The expression is there quoted under 'bell' and defined 'to win the prize at a race, where a bell was the usual prize.' In explanation is further added: Among the Romans it (a horse race) was an olympic exercise, and the prize was a garland but now 'they bear the bell away' and the following quotation is offered in illustration:

Here lyes the man whose horse did gaine  
The bell, in race on Salisbury plain.

*Camd. Remains*, p. 348.

The phrase 'to lose the bell' meaning to be worsted is also cited. The line in question would therefore mean, to win the prize of Albion, become supreme in Albion.

In stanza eighteen, line 1: *Dewtie and dettes ar drevin by doubilness* is rendered in the margin, 'debts are increased by cunning,' and *drevin* is glossed 'urged strongly.' Is not the meaning simply, 'duties are violated by such hypocrisy?'

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